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AUTHOR Shelton, Aubrey W.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of the Mississippi Legislative Reform Act on elementary education majors. The purpose of the study was to organize data to be used to provide short and long term program planning specifically for future elementary school teachers. Phase one of the study provided a demographic profile of students majoring in elementary education at Mississippi State University. The second phase will study predictive relationships between the American College Test (ACT), the National Teacher Examination (NTE), and the State of Mississippi College Outcome Measures Program (COMP). The sample included data from all elementary education majors graduating beginning fall 1982 through 1987, a time period encompassing two years before and three years after the Mississippi Legislative Reform Act. Mean test scores are reported for the ACT and NTE, the commonly accepted standardized measures. An analysis indicates significant positive change in all ACT areas and the general knowledge of the NTE. It is posited that the major change that could have produced improvement in scores was caused by the screening out of students by using the COMP. (JD)

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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF PRE AND POST REFORM ACT DATA ON ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJORS

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by

Aubrey W. Shelton, Mississippi State University
James S. Turner, Mississippi State University
Marcia L. Sumrall, Mississippi State University

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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF PRE AND POST REFORM ACT DATA ON ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJORS

Over the past five years numerous commissions have reported suggestions to institutions of higher education, particularly colleges of education, concerning the improvement of teacher education. Reform movements become expedient when some force outside the education establishment becomes powerful enough to cause change or is interested enough to try and create change.

Traditionally, these "others" have always known what needs to be accomplished to improve the profession (i.e., tougher standards, lesser standards, "better" teachers, more academics, research based, etc.). Since most reform has been brought about by outside influences, it is interesting to note that failures of the education system are still blamed on the system. ("Recent Reports," 1983). The outside forces which brought about the changes are seldom considered when blame is spread around.

In addition to the general castigation of education, these reports, commissions, etc. have been geared toward improving secondary education and post secondary education. A result of all those suggestions causes a domino effect in elementary schools and elementary teacher education programs. The assumption is that all that is suggested about the level above elementary applies also to the elementary level, when in fact, it does not. Evidence is accruing that teacher education is turning into a technical/vocational approach (skills teaching to put in place tomorrow), yet practicing teachers are of the opinion the skills are gained only through classroom experience (Stone, 1987).

A sense of deja vu fills the air if one reviews the Holmes Group Forum (Kevaney, 1987). It stresses teaching and researching higher order thinking, convincing outsiders (other faculty and other institutions) to

embrace the "new" ideas, and exceptionally well written jargonese in an attempt to show that the view point of this "group" is vastly different from other groups dispensing advice.

Critical reports replete with dire prophecies about the public schools have surfaced approximately one per decade since 1883, culminating with the recent 1983-86 period. Nearly all of the reports during this one hundred year period conflict with previous findings. We now appear to be in a period of excellence, interpreted as more hours, more homework, more testing, more of everything. While the subject of poor teaching, a commonality among the reports, is often discussed none touches on the topic of good teaching. ("Scholar Pinpoints Holes," 1984). We are now riding on the crest of the most recent wave of school reform which will subside in roughly seven to ten years if history repeats itself.

Why are we undergoing change in elementary education teacher programs? Partly because the general perception by the public is that change is synonymous with improvement.

In 1983 Mr. William Bennett, U. S. Secretary of Education released the first report on the condition of elementary schools since 1953. Succinctly he concluded "... that American elementary education is not menaced by a rising tide of mediocrity." [pg. 1]

If as described in the literature for years that the one most important ingredient in the success of the learner is the teacher, then one must conclude that the preparation of elementary teachers is generally satisfactory.

Other reports such as Becoming a Nation of Readers (Binkley, 1986) stresses the usual suggestions about creating a literate school populace

that limits workbook time and skill sheets and increased independent reading and writing.

Yet, what are we teaching to our majors? Bits and pieces of core curriculum, one of this one and one of that, more testing of factual material, more roadblocks, escalated grade point averages, tests before admittance to education, tests to get out, and instruments to measure first year probationary teachers, etc.

It appears that some attempts to teach the same material to all students is not only catching fire, but is under fire. Trinity University professors have recently made recommendations for improving education in Texas' required "essential elements" materials. They report that these materials are so restrictive that "excitement, spontaneity, and student interest" is on the wane. ("Instructor," 1987).

Our purpose albeit after the fact was and is to apply a research basis to our college of education reform as it applies directly to elementary education majors. Why? Because reform suggestions mentioned earlier all were basically tuned to secondary and post secondary education. Yet, the elementary education program was dragged in the same direction as all the college of education program.

We did not know where that direction had been, based on research.

We did not know where the new direction was aimed, based on research.

We had no mechanism for measuring the benefits of any change.

Therefore it seemed appropriate for our institution to collect base data on students in elementary education in order to provide insight concerning our present program and to compare it with results of planned and future changes.

The purpose of the study was to organize raw data into some manageable form to be used to provide short and long term program planning. Specifically, to organize the data around the following information:

ACT	NTE	COMP
English	Communication Skills	General
Math	General Knowledge	Speaking
Social Science	Professional Knowledge	Writing
Natural Science	Speciality Area	
Composite		

Phase one of this study provided a demographic profile of the elementary major. Phase two will study predicative relationships between the ACT's, NTE's, and the State of Mississippi College Outcome Measures Program (COMP). This study will only be concerned with Phase One.

The sample includes data from all elementary education majors graduating beginning fall 1982 through 1987; a time period encompassing two years before and three years after the Mississippi Legislative Reform Act.

Means for the ACT, NTE, and COMP are reported. These tests are commonly accepted standardized measures. Other demographic information includes (pre and post reform) age, sex, race, transfer status, etc. Subjects studied ranged in number from approximately 50-100 each year due to the variance in institutional requirements for students qualifying for entrance into the College of Education.

Table I

Demographic Profile
Elementary Majors
1982/83 - Present

	(N)	Age	Sex	Race	Transfer
Age at Graduation	(389)	22.75			
Female	(376)		96.7%		
Male	(10)		2.6%		
Other	(3)		.8%		
White	(328)			84.3%	
Black	(23)			5.9%	
Oriental	(4)			1.0%	
Not Reported	(34)			8.7%	
Transfers	(316)				81.2%
Non-Tranfers	(73)				18.8%

Summary

A review of the personal data in Table I illustrates the average elementary education major that graduates from Mississippi State University is 22.7 years of age, female, white, and has more than likely transfered from another institution.

Table II

ACT Profile
Elementary Majors
1982-84 - Present

ACT Area	Graduating Before 1984 (N=60)	Graduated After 1984 (N=153)	
	MEAN	MEAN	F
English	16.76	19.93	21.730*
Mathematics	13.83	16.25	7.001*
Social Science	13.38	17.26	21.659*
Science	17.31	19.52	7.979*
Composite	15.55	18.25	18.840*

* .01 Level of Significance

Summary

Legislative reform and State Board policies concerning university entrance requirements came into effect after the graduating class of 1983-84. As shown in Table II there was an improvement (significant at .01 level) on all area mean scores and the composite mean scores of the ACT.

Table III

NTE Profile
1982-84/84-Present

NTE AREA	Graduating Before 1984 (N=81)	Graduating After 1984 (N=203)	
	MEAN	MEAN	F
Communication Skills	655.16	658.27	3.644
General Knowledge	648.48	652.73	6.760*
Professional Knowledge	638.88	653.38	2.623
Area Examination/ Elementary	543.33	586.22	1.27

* .01 Level of significance

Summary

Students graduating after 1984 show no significant change in any NTE area mean scores except for General Knowledge. All mean scores did increase.

SUMMARY

Examination of the demographic data provides a picture of the most recent graduates as female, white, 22.7 years of age, and a transfer student. Analysis of the data show significant change in all ACT areas and the general knowledge of the NTE.

It would appear the major change that could have produced improvement scores was caused by the screening out of students by using the Mississippi College Outcome Measures Program.

This has had the effect of making it appear that students are doing better academically when it may be that only students with better backgrounds are remaining in the program. Better students make better students.

This information will be used to form the base upon which to study all curricular changes brought about since the State and Legislative Reform Act of 1984.

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